

**Amendments to the Claims:**

Please cancel claims 1 to 15 as presented in the underlying International Application No. PCT/DE2004/000002.

Please add new claims 16-31 as indicated in the listing of claims below.

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1-15 (canceled).

Claim 16 (new): A method for operating a fuel cell system including a fuel cell and an energy storage device for supplying an electric load with electric power, the method comprising:

periodically connecting and disconnecting the fuel cell with the electric load using a first switch; and

periodically connecting and disconnecting the energy storage device with the electric load using a second switch, wherein the first and second switches are disposed in a switching device and operate independently of one another.

Claim 17 (new): The method as recited in claim 16, further comprising connecting the energy storage device to the fuel cell in a pulsed manner so as to store excess power when more power is generated by the fuel cell than is required by the electric load.

Claim 18 (new): The method as recited in claim 16, further comprising connecting the energy storage device to the electric load when the electric load requires electric power, and when the fuel cell is not connected to the electric load.

Claim 19 (new): The method as recited in claim 16, further comprising disconnecting the energy storage device from fuel cell and the electric load when a voltage peak occurs and reconnecting the energy storage device to the fuel cell and the electric load after the voltage peak has subsided.

Claim 20 (new): The method as recited in claim 16, further comprising switching the energy storage device in a pulsed manner to at least one of the electric load and the fuel cell during a charging of the energy storage device, wherein a duration of each power pulse is shorter than a duration of a discharge of an internal capacitance associated with the energy storage device.

Claim 21 (new): The method as recited in claim 16, wherein the switching is performed which only when charging the energy storage device at a high charging power level.

Claim 22 (new): The method as recited in claim 16, wherein the energy storage device is disconnected from the electric load using the second switch above a first predetermined threshold voltage and below a second predetermined threshold voltage.

Claim 23 (new): The method as recited in claim 16, wherein connecting and disconnecting using the first and second switcher is performed so as to switch the fuel cell system between a plurality of operating states such that an optimized operating range of the fuel cell system is established on average over time with regard to power and efficiency.

Claim 24 (new): The method as recited in claim 16, further comprising changing a switching frequency for actuating the first and second switches as a function of a power requirement of the load.

Claim 25 (new): A fuel cell system, comprising:

- a fuel cell for supplying an electric load with power;
- an energy storage device; and
- a switching device having at least two switches configured to connect and disconnect the fuel cell and the energy storage device with the electric load independently of one another.

Claim 26 (new): The fuel cell system as recited in claim 25, wherein the switching device includes a third switch for connecting and disconnecting the electric load with the energy storage device and the fuel cell.

Claim 27 (new): The fuel cell system as recited in claim 25, wherein the energy storage device includes a battery.

Claim 28 (new): The fuel cell system as recited in claim 26, further comprising a charge store connected parallel to the electric load.

Claim 29 (new): The fuel cell system as recited in claim 28, wherein the third switch is disposed between the charge store on one side and the fuel cell and energy storage device on the other side, so that the charge store and the electric load are always connected.

Claim 30 (new): The fuel cell system as recited in claim 28, wherein the charge store includes a supercap.

Claim 31 (new): The fuel cell system as recited in claim 28, wherein the fuel cell is disposed on a motor vehicle.